

1997 Session Report

12th Legislative District



Spring 1997



Representative **Linda Evans Parlette**

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Committee Assignments:
Agriculture and Ecology
 vice chairman
Appropriations
Health Care

Dear friends,

Greetings to my friends in the 12th District — it's great to be back home! This was truly a historic year in Olympia. Lawmakers, in cooperation with the governor, enacted two revolutionary reform measures that will change the course of welfare and juvenile justice forever in this state. We forged an operating budget that is \$112 million below the Initiative 601 spending limit. And when we adjourned April 27, it was the first time since 1957 the Legislature completed its work on time in a budget-writing year. In short, this was *definitely* a session worth writing home about.

As a member of the House Appropriations Committee, I saw firsthand how the 1997-99 budget came together, and worked hard to ensure your tax dollars are being utilized efficiently and responsibly by state government. Although the final product was not perfect, compromise was necessary to find common ground among all interests. The operating budget approved by the Legislature and governor for 1997-99 met the goal of funding education first, giving tax relief to taxpayers, and continuing the job of reshaping government to better serve the people of this state. The specifics of the final spending plan are outlined in this report.

It is an honor representing the people of the 12th District, and I invite you to contact my office in Olympia or my home here in Wenatchee. I need your ideas in order to represent you effectively in the Legislature. If you have questions about anything contained in this report, or on other state government issues of interest to you personally, I urge you to contact my office by phone, fax, letter or e-mail. I welcome your thoughts and thank you in advance for your interest.

Sincerely,

Linda Evans Parlette
State Representative

Representative Linda Evans Parlette

State spending: *Your tax dollars at work*

The Legislature's \$19.073 billion state operating budget for 1997-99 strengthens and enhances public schools and higher education. Our goal is to provide Washington's students with the best education possible — to prepare them for life beyond the classroom upon graduation. We also wanted to expand financial aid and access to our higher education system for those students seeking higher learning opportunities. This budget does both.

K-12 education

The 1997-99 budget provides \$288 million in total enhancements to K-12 education, including:

- ♦ \$196.3 million in teacher salary and health benefit increases
- ♦ \$51 million for student learning improvement grants
- ♦ \$39 million for new technology in classrooms
- ♦ \$2.9 million for gifted programs

♦ \$20 million sent directly to school districts for the purchase of instructional materials such as books, software and other technology-related investments. (This is expected to provide about \$458 per average-size classroom.)

♦ \$5 million for third-grade reading literacy programs

Higher education

Higher education also fared well in this budget. We've allocated \$39.8 million to meet increased enrollment demands by creating 6,390 new slots for students — 2,190 in the four-year schools and 4,200 in community and technical colleges. Student financial aid will receive a \$34 million increase, too.

Tax cuts

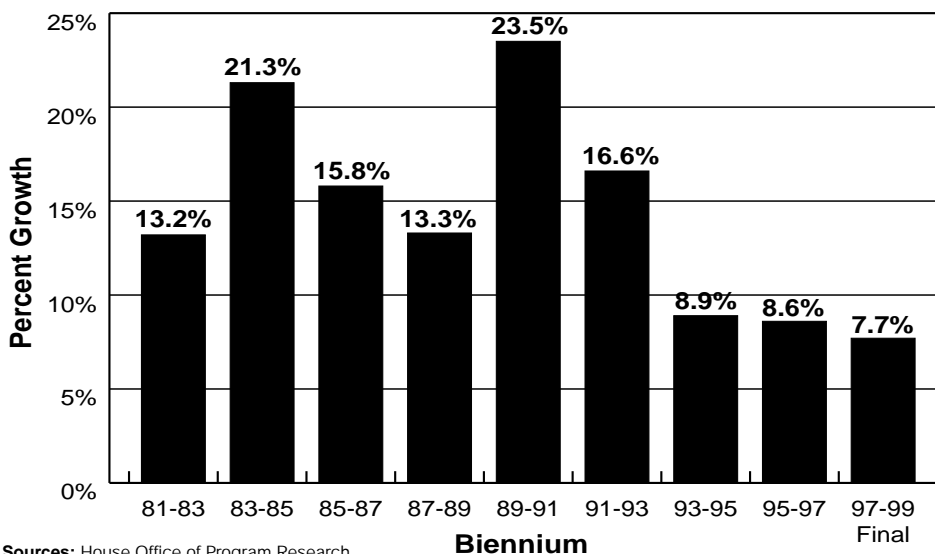
Tax cuts were high on our priority list this session. The 1997-99 budget provides \$414 million in tax cuts, including a meaningful property tax referendum that will prevent an increase in the state property tax levy and limit increases in all nonvoter-approved levies. The

referendum, which will appear on the November ballot, would cut the state's portion of the property tax by 4.7 percent and limit state and local property-tax collections to 6 percent or the rate of inflation, whichever is lower.

Business and occupation taxes will also be reduced. Last session, the Legislature reduced the 1993 B&O tax increase by one-half. This year, the Legislature rolled back the remaining portion of the B&O tax increase, but Gov. Locke vetoed when that rollback takes effect. The Legislature wanted it implemented this year. The governor makes it effective July 1, 1998.

Finally, our overall spending level was \$112 million below the Initiative 601 spending limit for 1995-97 and leaves the state with a \$366 million reserve. This budget represents a 7.7 percent increase over the previous biennium, **which is the lowest biennial increase since 1971 (see graph)**. The Legislature also agreed to spend \$1.9 billion on the state's capital budget for construction and maintenance projects, plus \$3.2 billion for transportation needs.

General Fund Expenditures
Biennial Percent Growth



Sources: House Office of Program Research,
Legislative Evaluation and Accountability Committee

Welfare reform

This year the Legislature enacted sweeping changes to the welfare system in Washington state. Gov. Locke signed those changes into law on April 17. The goal of this welfare reform policy is to restore the ethic of personal responsibility. Able-bodied recipients will be expected to work or participate in job training to prepare for entry into the working world.

Here are some of the key elements of our welfare plan:

- ♦ **Welfare:** Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) is

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disbanded and renamed Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

- ♦ **Work requirement:** All recipients of TANF cash grants must work or seek employment.
- ♦ **Needs assessment:** Those who don't find work will be assessed to determine their work and educational skills and needs. Based on the results, a personal responsibility plan will be developed detailing steps the person will take to become self-sufficient.
- ♦ **Time limits:** Recipients may receive benefits for no more than five years in their lifetime.
- ♦ **Teen parents:** Teen recipients will be required to live with their parents or other responsible adults and to finish their high school education.

A hard look at juvenile justice

This session, lawmakers cracked down on juvenile crime in our state. Under the new juvenile reform measure, HB 3900, youth offenders will face consequences for their behavior on their first interaction with the law. Judges and prosecutors will have the ability to ensure the punishment fits the crime. And we've offered greater sentencing alternatives, including the use of boot camps, home detention, mandatory alcohol and drug treatment, and community service.

The cornerstone of HB 3900 is how we've chosen to deal with 16- and 17-year-old violent offenders. From now on, 16- and 17-year-olds who commit certain violent crimes — including drive-by shootings and any crime in which the offender was



Rep. Parlette served as vice chair of the House Agriculture and Ecology Committee this session.

armed with a firearm — will be tried and punished in the adult system.

Finally, adult offenders will be affected by the reforms of this bill as well. No adult will be considered a first-time offender if they had a felony record as a juvenile, meaning juvenile felonies will count toward the "Three Strikes You're Out" and "Hard Time for Armed Crime" laws.

12th District legislation

Here's a look at some of the legislation I prime sponsored this session:

HB 2080 creates a new designation within the current open space laws to deal with agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance. The grower or the farmer will get a tax benefit similar to benefits extended for open space. The difference is that there will not be reimbursements due to the county "someday" when or if the county determines that the land no longer needs to stay in agriculture. Currently, the Growth Management

Act (GMA) requires that counties planning under GMA guidelines designate lands of long-term commercial significance for agriculture. As it stands now, growers and farmers do not have a choice in this matter — they are told that their lands must stay in agriculture. Personally, I do not think that is fair, and I based HB 2080 on my belief. HB 2080 passed the House 98-0 and the Senate 45-2 and awaits the governor's signature as this goes to press.

HB 2143 authorizes cities and towns to grant volunteer ambulance personnel the same benefits and compensation as other volunteers. I introduced this bill at the request of the city of Soap Lake. HB 2143 was signed by the governor April 19.

HB 1251 allows a government entity such as the City of Wenatchee to ask the state to dissolve a business using its name. Before I sponsored this measure, the secretary of state could not legally bar individuals or groups from taking the names of local government as their own. HB 1251 is

essentially a procedural matter, but from a legal standpoint, it prevents a number of potential nightmares.

HB 2081 deals with the issue of spray drift. I nicknamed this bill "The Nolen Bill" after the late Gerald Nolen. Gerry was very involved in this issue as a member of the Washington State Horticultural Association. This bill was introduced late in the session to generate discussions on the subject. I will be working on this issue during the interim and I welcome your input.

Water issues

Of the 45 bills the House Agriculture and Ecology Committee sent to the governor this session, the water legislation had to be the most complex and controversial of them all. HB 2054 was the omnibus watershed planning bill of 1997. Its purpose is to develop a more thorough and cooperative method of determining what the current water resource situation is in each water resource inventory area (WRIA) of the state. This measure, along with 16 other bills dealing with water, awaits the governor's review as of this writing.

Health care

The operating budget adds \$14 million in general fund spending to the Health Services Account to increase enrollment in the state's Basic Health Plan. This equates to 11,500 new slots for low-income families, 8,000 new individual enrollees and extends coverage for 3,500 home-care workers.

As a member of the House Health Care Committee, I worked hard to ensure the Basic Health Plan was not stretched beyond its means, resulting in program cuts or future budget reductions. This budget sustains the BHP and secures the opportunity to provide health-care coverage to hundreds of thousands of low-income families.

Another measure, HB 1850, is probably the other most important piece of health-care legislation we approved this year, particularly for senior citizens. It establishes policies and procedures for long-term care facilities and guidelines for processing complaints about care and treatment.

Finally, I will continue to look into the issue of individual insurance

policies. A bill introduced in the House this session, HB 2018, attempted to stabilize the insurance market, but was largely vetoed by Gov. Locke.

Stadium information

If you would like information about the Seahawks' stadium financing package, please contact my office in Olympia (360) 786-7832. The public vote on the plan is June 17.

Radio town halls

Sen. George Sellar, House Speaker Clyde Ballard and myself will be taking calls at three 12th District radio stations June 4 and 5 regarding the 1997 legislative session. We'll be on the air at the following dates, times and stations:

- June 4

9 a.m. - 10 a.m. — KOZI — Chelan

- June 5

8 a.m. - 9 a.m. — KOMW — Omak

10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. — KVLR — Twisp